

## **Oral History Cover Sheet**

**Name:** Roger Spaulding  
**Interviewer:** Brett Billings

**Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service:** 25+

**Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held:** Park Ranger for Corps of Engineers; Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Florida; Refuge Manager at Long Island Refuge Complex, New York; National Uniform Coordinator in Washington D.C.; Fire Equipment Specialist at the Fire Center; Deputy Regional Fire Coordinator for Region 1, Oregon.

**Most Important Projects:** Creating the Hazard Fuels Program and the National Fire Program

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Frank Cole, Roger Erb

**Brief Summary of Interview:** Mr. Spaulding discusses how he became interested in the Fish and Wildlife Service, going to work for the Corps of Engineers as a Park Ranger, applying for positions for Fish and Wildlife Service and getting a position with them. He talks about changes that occurred within the Fire Program while working for the Service, how prescribed fire is a tool for refuge management, highpoints of his career, and shares a humorous story when he was at Long Island Refuge. He also gives the names of a few people that he feels should be interviewed because of their influence with the Fire Program.

INTERVIEWER: If you would give us your name and spell it the way you like it.

RS: Roger A. Spaulding, and it's spelled S-P-A-U-L-D-I-N-G. Roger is R-O-G-E-R.

INTERVIEWER: And your birthplace and birthdate.

RS: St. Johnsbury, Vermont in May 18, 1951.

INTERVIEWER: And what's your educational background?

RS: I have a BS in Wildlife Management from the University of Maine.

INTERVIEWER: And what years have you been employed with Fire Program and Fish and Wildlife Service?

RS: Well, I've been working for the Fish and Wildlife Service in Refuges since 1977, and I've been in the Fire Program since 1990. I was in our Washington, D.C. office just prior to that and moved out to the Fire Center in 1990.

INTERVIEWER: Other than those assignments, any other duties or duty stations within the Fire Program?

RS: Not within the Fire Program until now; I'm at the Portland Regional Office. But previous to that I was actually in Refuges out as a Refuge Manager.

INTERVIEWER: And your current position at the Portland Regional Office?

RS: My current position is the Deputy Regional Fire Coordinator for Region 1.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back to the Service. How did you get involved working for the Service in the first place?

RS: Well, I majored in Wildlife Management in college so I had in mind working for one of the federal agencies or a state agency at the time. A presentation was made during one of my courses while I was at school by what was called at that time the U.S. Game Management Agent, which now we would call a Special Agent. And at that time, of course, those guys were involved in more of the broad range of wildlife management by Fish and Wildlife Service rather than just law enforcement; that was one of the things they dealt with. And it sounded like a really neat job. And so in the back of my mind Fish and Wildlife Service became someone that I wanted to work for. When I graduated from college in 1973, I took a test, at the time it was called The Professional and Career Entrance Exam, I believe it was; PACE Exam, which there's no exams like that now when you first start out. Promptly forgot about the exam and a few months later I got a notice in the mail that said, "Come in for an interview." Well, it was an interview with the Corps of Engineers as a Park Ranger, and I started working for them in 1974; the spring of 1974. And enjoyed that fairly well, and then the Bi-Centennial Land Heritage Program came along in 1976. And it was a huge shot in the arm for Refuges. At the time they were adding about 500 new positions, which doesn't sound like that many in today's world but that was a big shot for refuges. And consequently

there were a number of vacancies and I remember firing applications off all over the country and subsequently was hired by Fish and Wildlife Service. Went down to Loxahatchee Refuge and spent about three years in the Everglades down there and that was lots of fun. Following that I was the Refuge Manager for the Long Island Refuge Complex, the Manager in Charge there. And spent about seven years there, which was a very interesting place to work because we had our facilities and some state parks and the Pine Barrens area there which was also owned by the state or a lot of it was owned by the counties, was about all that wasn't developed on Long Island. So there was an intensive public use pressure on us. We had a fairly significant wildfire program when I first got there also; most all of it was human caused fires. And it was partly through that and previous exposure doing prescribed fire at other refuges that I got interested kind of in the Fire Program. After being there for seven years on Long Island, an opportunity came to move into the Washington Office. I went in there in 1987 and spent a couple of years working as the Uniform Coordinator, the National Uniform Coordinator and also I was the Control Correspondence Coordinator while I was there, which was a lot of fun; responsible for developing the responses to all the Congressional correspondence that would come into refuges. It was a real good learning opportunity and it was a lot of fun too. Then in 1990 the big expansion for Fish and Wildlife Service's Fire Program came about. It was a combination of things that led up to a huge increase in our funding. Part of it was the tragedies that had occurred previously at Okefenokee and at Merritt Island. And then the 1988 Yellowstone

fires resulted in a complete review of all the federal agencies fire programs. And one of the things that came out of it was that Fish and Wildlife Service was directed to have dedicated fire personnel. And the fire funding for the agency went from about 3.2 million dollars up to 15 million dollars. And with that we went from about 23, I think it was, fire positions up to I think I went initially up to 120, I think it was. So the program took a huge increase over night and the position that I took at the Fire Center was one of those new positions. Previous to that the office out there had three people in it, the National Fire Management Coordinator, and a Secretary, and one part-time training person that would come in for about six weeks during the summer. This big push came along, we basically ramped up the whole program nationally and the office expanded to, I think it was nine people altogether. There was myself, when I first went out there my actual job title was Fire Equipment Specialist. And of course we still had the Fire Coordinator and the Secretary, a temporary training person, but we then also had a full-time training person, and a Fire Ecologist.

[Break in tape]

RS: ....now I can't remember if the Fire Operations person was there right at the beginning or if that came along later on. I think that actually came on a little bit later on. When we first got out there, when I first got out there in 1990, there were just those few positions, but still that was over a two hundred percent increase in what the staffing had been there. Eventually built up, at the time that I left we had, I think it was, twelve positions at the Fire Center and it's grown some since then.

INTERVIEWER: What other events have caused increases in funding or support of the Fire Program?

RS: Well, probably the next, there was a couple significant instances that Fish and Wildlife Service gained in their Fire Program. Probably the next real watershed that occurred for the Fire Program was the authority, which was granted under the 1998 Appropriations Act, to dedicate funding from what had previously been strictly the Suppression Account to take money from that account and use it to accomplish our prescribed fires. And that was an opportunity that came about in part because of my efforts. I was from, after 1995, I was primarily involved in the National Budget Formulation and Execution for the Fire Program. And part of that involved sitting on an interagency budget team of the other three Department of Interior Fire Agencies. The fire budget for Interior is all appropriated to the Bureau of Land Management and then is allocated out to the other three Bureaus, BIA, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service, subsequent to the actual appropriation to BLM. The request that goes in that, that appropriation is based, of course, is made up of each one of those agencies' needs. But the actual justification document is a single document that goes forward. So in order to ensure that everyone's needs are met, both in the process of the request and then in the process of allocating out the appropriation. There was an interagency committee formed at the Fire Center of the key budget leads for each one of those four agencies, and I was one of those folks. Well, starting in 1996 we began to talk about the need to get a greater funding source, a more reliable

funding source, to accomplish our prescribed fire programs. And at the time the Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service really had the largest prescribed fire programs in Interior, and ours was by far the largest. At that time, we were burning, and for several years thereafter, we were burning more acres, Fish and Wildlife Service, than all the other three agencies put together. And it was primarily a habitat management program, both for us and for the Park Service. We began to talk about the need to get dedicated funding. And in concert with the Department, the budget folks in Department of Interior, we came up with an idea that it might be possible to essentially tap the Suppression Account to do some of our prescribed fires. And the idea evolved that we could sell to, first the Department and then to the Appropriators, OMB and the Appropriators, the idea that if we accomplished, if we increased the amount prescribed fire that we were accomplishing then there should be in turn a reduction in the needs for fire suppression.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a tough sell?

RS: Well, it wasn't really that much of a tough sell, the timing was good. We did have to make a number of different presentations including before the Appropriation Committee's staffers, and folks at Department, but we were successful in convincing them that there would be a tie from our prescribed fire efforts to our overall suppression costs. The program, to reiterate that tie, the program was called Hazard Fuel Reduction. But we were very careful, and I in particular, was very careful to ensure that the wording of the authorization included using the dollars

for ecological prescribed fire benefits. And that increased the funding that we had available for prescribed fire in particular from about a million and a half dollars a year up to the first year seven million dollars, and the subsequent year, nine million dollars; the actual authority started in 1998. So we increased the ability to accomplish our prescribed fires by many fold.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel that that has paid off?

RS: Tremendously. There's been a very market increase in our abilities to accomplish the goals of Refuges through the Fire Program. We were able to fund additional positions dedicated to the prescribed fire realm, and therefore increased our expertise in the ability to get things done. Also there's a side benefit from the standpoint that essentially we freed up some of Refuges' resources. Now Refuge folks still do and always have contributed their time and equipment and efforts to the prescribed fire program because prescribed fire is very integral to fire management. But this new authority allowed us to make a quantum leap beyond what had been possible and have dedicated professionals working on this and it did allow Refuges to free up, to a certain extent, some of their folks so they were also able then to redirect some of their efforts at other areas of Refuge management. So there was a double whammy as far as the benefits from this program. The next really significant shot in the arm for the Fire Program came, of course, with the National Fire Plan. The National Fire Plan is tied to the funding that was brought to the agencies in the 2001 Appropriations. And the actual genesis of the National

Fire Program, the National Fire Plan, actually goes back again to this Interior budget group along with the Forest Service. In 2000, then President Clinton came to the Fire Center and toured a number of the large project fires that were currently burning in Idaho. And basically opened a window of opportunity for all of the fire agencies to ask for what they needed, virtually anything we needed. We were told, "You tell us what it is that you need to do a better job to prevent this type of disaster from occurring." So the committee along with an individual from the Forest Service sat down and wrote the first drafts of what became the National Fire Plan document. And of course after the first draft it began to be a largely political document and was taken over by the folks at the two departmental levels and the final product came out of those folks' efforts. But the National Fire Plan increased our funding in the hazard fuels category from about nine million dollar appropriation to twelve million dollars; it created a completely new authority for wild and urban interface fuels, which is in part of Prescribed Fire Program and in part of Mechanicals, Mechanical Treatment Program; that program was also funded at twelve million dollars. And our preparedness funding in Fish and Wildlife Service went from this approximately fifteen million dollar figure to twenty-six million dollars. So we took another huge leap in our capabilities to address fire on Fish and Wildlife Service lands.

INTERVIEWER: Fantastic. So it's come a long way in just a few decades.

RS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Let's just kind of go back through your career, think of maybe the different Presidents or Secretaries of the Interior, Directors that you worked under. Any notables that stand out, I remember you said that President Clinton did actually come and tour the Interagency Fire Center.

RS: He didn't actually tour the Fire Center, he came and of course he landed at the airfield in Boise, but he did meet the Fire Directors, spoke with them for a short period and then of course went out to some of these active fires and spoke to the Incident Command Teams out there. So we didn't really get a chance to give him much of a briefing at the Fire Center, no.

INTERVIEWER: Thinking back on your career in fire, what were some of the highpoints?

RS: Well probably, like I said, the opportunity to create the Hazard Fuels, what we call our 9263 Program, was certainly one of the highpoints; I think that's one of my legacies. And the National Fire Plan was also one of those highpoints. Some of the things that I've done that were fun, probably one of the most fun things I've done over the last several years is, is to lead the cadre, the Interagency cadre that is, in charge of putting on the training for full-time military personnel when they're called up to be used as fire fighters. We've done that a number of times in the last fifteen years and I've been involved with it every time going back to 1990, and I've been lucky enough to lead that effort from about 1995 on. So that's been a lot of fun; we go around to military bases and meet different folks and put the training on, and send these

guys off. And it's really interesting to see how these military troops come into this; they're highly trained for what they do. This is a completely different world to them, and it's interesting to find out that many of them are more trepidatious about going out and fighting a fire, than they are going out and facing an enemy with weapons, but it's a lot of fun; I've enjoyed that.

INTERVIEWER: Any low points?

RS: Well, I don't really, no I don't really want to talk about any low points.

INTERVIEWER: That's fine. Any dangerous, frightening experiences in relation to fires?

RS: You know I never really did, I had a lot of awe inspiring moments, but I never really had any situations where I really felt in danger or truly uncomfortable.

INTERVIEWER: What was an awe inspiring moment?

RS: Oh, anytime that you're out on a night shift and you're in a spot where you can watch the fire working, and see trees torching; it's awe inspiring, that's what most people are in it for is those kinds of moments.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that the Fire Program attracts a certain type of individual or personality?

RS: I think it may, yeah. I think it does tend to attract people that are interested in high energy kinds of activities; yeah, I think it probably does. On the other hand, it has, I mean like I said, I was originally a Refuge Management person

and it brought me over because of the fact that I could see what we could accomplish for Refuges first. And then because it was a really interesting and fun thing to do. So yeah, I guess it probably does attract a certain kind of person.

INTERVIEWER: So sounds like your refuge-based background really influenced your career in fire.

RS: Well, there's no question about it. I mean Fire Management is a tool that's used by refuges and has been going way back to the beginning of the system. It's interesting since the National Fire Plan, in particular, the other four National Fire Agencies, Federal Fire Agencies, are frequently noted for their prescribed fire programs and talk very much about how active their programs are. But the reality is the Fish and Wildlife Service has been doing it for 70 years now, or more, and we're the real experts. And we are recognized as being the real prescribed fire experts. So it's tied right back to the land and Refuges is the land in Fish and Wildlife Service.

INTERVIEWER: You have a real interest in prescribed fire, don't you?

RS: Well, that's part of, part and parcel to fire management and for Fish and Wildlife Service, that's a big part of what we do.

INTERVIEWER: For somebody who's just Joe Blow off the street doesn't know anything fire management much less prescribed fire, which is a very specific type of fire. How would you explain what prescribed fire is and its advantages to the layman?

RS: Well, prescribed fire is a tool. It's a means for us to modify habitats, to address problems with unwanted vegetation, to encourage vegetation to grow, to change the seral stages, to open areas up. It's a tool that we use in the tool box for refuge management. And it's a tool that can do things for habitat management that you can't do with any other tools, because so much of the lands that are integral to the National Wildlife Refuge System, and really to North America, are fire ecology lands. And fire plays a very deep role in the natural operations of the ecology. And so if you exclude fire, you upset the natural role. If you do not, if you allow wild fires to burn unchecked, you also upset the natural balance of things. In particular, where you've first excluded things to the point where fuels have built up to extreme levels and then when a wild fire comes through it can be devastating. So the primary means for managing habitat, or one of the primary means for managing habitat the Fish and Wildlife uses and the other agencies use also, is prescribed fire. So it's a tool in our tool box that can accomplish things for us that you can't do with anything else.

INTERVIEWER: Have you witnessed any new Service inventions or innovations in relation to fire management, fire program?

RS: Well, I'm not sure that I could really say any new inventions...

INTERVIEWER: Or things that have evolved.

RS: ...I've seen things steadily improve over the years, I guess. Well, I guess I can go back and relate it to my career

back when I was at Loxahatchee Refuge; things were pretty informal in fire in those days. And in many ways that's probably what contributed to the tragedies that occurred. We didn't take it seriously enough, but on the lighter side of it when I look back at that, we used to call it a Remote Ignition Device. Now a Remote Ignition Device is just what it sounds like, it's a means to start a fire burning remote from your immediate location. There's a lot of different ways that it's done nowadays, but what we called a Remote Ignition Device in those days was to take a roll of toilet paper and soak it in diesel fuel and put it on the end of a broomstick and fling it across the canal. So things have come a ways from that standpoint; we use a whole lot of different means to do that today. Of course anything from flares to flame throwers, what we call terra torches; I mean they boil down to a flame thrower. A lot of different kinds of innovations, we still use all the basic tools, the old fashioned drip torch, but we've innovated that and have some kind of high tech versions of it that we use on ATV's that allow us to get into areas and put a lot of fire down in a rapid manner but in a safe manner. Of course we use helicopters and things like that too, both for prescribed fire and for wild fire as part of the tactics to attack a fire with also. There's a lot of things like that, that have been around for a long time but maybe as things go on they slowly improve. One of the things in recent years, again it's been there for a while but it's just beginning to be really appreciated again and getting used more, is the single engine air tanker. Kind of brought about the resurgence of the use of them was kind of brought about by the problems that began to occur with the large air tanker fleet in 2000, 2002, I

mean. We've been forced to learn to get along without those large air tankers to the extent that we used to rely on them and we rediscovered the single engine air tanker, a tool which really the whole use of air tankers goes all the way back; the very first air tankers were single engine air tankers. So we've kind of come full circle on that.

INTERVIEWER: How about things like current meteorological systems, GPS...?

RS: Oh sure, sure. From that standpoint, yeah things have changed drastically. You used to have to map your fire parameters with aerial photographs and planimeters and things like that, that I barely remember what they look like from my school days. And nowadays, of course, it's like you say the GPS is used to map the fire parameters, GPS is used to dispatch crews to do initial attack, GPS is used to coordinate with your aerial resources; they're totally integral. It's just like anything else in technology, if they took them away from us we wouldn't be able to do anything; all of a sudden we've forgotten how we used to do those things. Of course cell phones are ubiquitous too; they're all over the place now. They're just as important to people in fire as anybody else; we do use satellite phones some time too, of course out in fire camps. Yeah, lots of different remote sensing techniques; we're involved now in a program called Landsat, which is an interagency effort using primarily USGS space craft to take imaging of Earth resources and we're using it as a means to map our habitat types for fuel management projects. And it's an interagency effort; all the Interior agencies are working with this program. So there's been a lot of those



kinds of things that have come along over the years, yes, no question about it.

INTERVIEWER: Thinking that this may be seen years from now by entry level fire fighters in the Service, what kind of advice do you have for them as far as education, training, for their career?

RS: Well, I think there's a few things that I would say to anybody whether they're in fire or not. And that is to not be afraid to take chances with their career. If you are, if you want to have a satisfying career and if you want to be able to go places with your career, you've got to go places with your career. I've seen over the years a lot of folks seem to have a tendency to want to homestead in places, and while that may sound like a good idea, you get to live in one place for a long time, it limits your experiences. So I would counsel folks to not be afraid to explore the opportunity of working in other areas and even in other realms, other fields within the resource management agencies. Fire Management, again, I would say every time you have an opportunity to take an assignment, take it. If you've got opportunities for training, I would say take those opportunities, apply yourself, and you can't do anything but go far.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Those were most of the big questions I think that were in here. Are there any other humorous experiences that you've had in fire management, anything pop to mind?

RS: Oh yeah, there was one a minute ago but I forgot it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, take a moment and just kind of look through here and

see if some other stuff pops out at you that you would like to make sure that we do get down.

RS: Oh, I remember what, it wasn't actually in fire but a humorous episode that occurred to me with a person who at the time was the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. While I was on Long Island, the then Director Robert Jantzen came to the refuge with the Regional Director at that time, and I can't remember what her name was unfortunately. But they came down to visit my refuges and have a tour, and one of the refuges was a spit off the eastern end of the island that went out into Montauk Bay. And it was sand spit, a very narrow sand spit that the only access out onto it was either walking or taking a 4-wheel drive vehicle along the beach. And we had been touring all the refuges all day long and we got out to this refuge, Morton Refuge was the name of it. And loaded up in the 4-wheel drive jeep and started out along the beach. And of course the vehicle began to get stuck and the more we pushed along the more stuck it got to be, and I was a little bit concerned. And Jantzen, who was sitting beside me, turned around and said, "You know, boy," says, "when your 4-wheel drive's stuck, you're real stuck." And I'll tell I was a little bit taken aback, but turned out we didn't have it in low range, and popped it back in low range and pulled right away and we were just fine. But for a few moments there I thought I was going to be hiking back with the Regional Director and the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service riding on my back or something back to the office; it was kind of funny.

INTERVIEWER: Any other folks that you can think of that we should make it a point to try to interview in relation to the Fire Program?

RS: Well, I think there's, I think you may have already talked to some of these folks, but I think there's three or four people that were really key people in Fish and Wildlife Service. Frank Cole was one of the previous Fire Coordinators. He was the person that oversaw the first large jump in our funding back in 1989, 1990, that transition period there. He was the person that went from the two and a half person office there at the Fire Center up to five and a half and eventually up to, the office eventually, of course, grew beyond that. He hired in that original staff, and unfortunately was not able to stay there very long after he got that going, but at least he was able to see that accomplished before his retirement date came around. The next person I think you may have already talked to already was Roger Erb, and he was the next National Fire Coordinator that came out. And I think probably single people, Roger Erb may have had more influence on the Fire Program than anyone else. The building, the Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Program as it is today, he took it all the way from that fledging beginning of a real professional program in 1990 up through the Fire Plan and where we are today really; we're still operating under the mantle that he left for us, and he was very important.

INTERVIEWER: All right. If you would just kind of check the sheet and make sure there's nothing else that jumps out that you want to hit before we go.

RS: Well, we've probably covered just about everything that we need to. Unless you can think of something else, I think we probably covered all the key issues.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. The only other thing is if you have any photographs, documents, anything like that you think it might be good to have copied, photographed to put in fire archives.

RS: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Anything along those lines you can think of and you can certainly get in touch with Karen Miranda Gleason and she can work on that. All right then, I think that will do it. Thank you so much.

RS: Thank you.